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Standing Committee on Climate change, Water, Environment and the Arts  
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Canberra ACT 2600  
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29/04/08

Response to the request for input into the investigation by the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts regarding the Effects of Global Warming On Coastal Communities

#### Likely Problems

- a. Physical Effects. Increasing extremes of weather which will likely result in:
  - i. increased problems due to potentially higher and more frequent storm surges.
  - ii. more flooding, rises in sea levels
  - iii. changes in flora and fauna environments, including the southbound increase of tropical diseases within natural ecosystems and economic crops.
  - iv. erosion of protective dunal systems with the destruction of the existing ecosystems contained therein as well as inundation of existing dry ground protected by existing dual systems.
  - v. need to provide storm gates on major waterways may be necessary to reduce the effects of surges.
  - vi. sea level rise would be particularly detrimental, since it would threaten the very viability of communities that have been established on river systems near to the coast, such as Noosaville, Maroochydore and Tewantin.
  
- b. Economic damage.
  - i. The loss of capital investment in housing, buildings and infrastructure established over many years would be significant.

- Some of our coastal communities have already experienced a situation where road access has been cut, sewage system have been backed-up and inoperative, and houses have been flooded due to storm-associated rising water.
- ii. Potential impact on vital infrastructure development opportunities resulting in them being put aside with a short- to medium-term impact on the regional socio-economic circumstances.
  - iii. Replacement of unusable infrastructure, relocation of communities and financial loss associated with communities which are no longer viable could be a significant cost
  - iv. Beyond dollar price measures would be the loss of habitat for flora and fauna (including diminution of ecosystem services), which are already under pressure due to development.
  - v. Major changes in recreation and tourism with environmental changes, for example, loss of beaches, flooding, and imposition of stinger suits for swimmers. The economy of this coast is largely dependant upon the tourism industry, but a degradation of the environment could cause a sharp decline in this, with a significant effect upon individuals, businesses and the community at large.

c. Effects on biodiversity

- i. Destruction of ecosystems is likely with significant effects upon the viability of some species.
- ii. Changing coastal water habitat, with the introduction of northern species, such as the box jellyfish, coral bleaching due to increase in UV light.
- iii. Increase in competition with a warmer climate moving southward introducing species not normally found in the area.

d. Some effects on people

- i. Opportunity for adaptation for some infrastructure but at a psychological and socio-economic cost. For example, houses are built on stumps, which offer the opportunity to raise them further if desired/required, but some are still being built on concrete slabs, and even with garages largely underground. Without an investment in future sustainability such investments may be substantially under threat.
- ii. Psychological and emotional distress due to trauma associated with impending and real damage to surrounding areas, property and possible financial loss.
- iii. Social dislocation associated with removal from areas threatened or no longer viable.
- iv. Enhanced human health threats and impacts from southward spread of tropical diseases and their vectors, for example malaria.

2. Recommendations the enquiry

- a. All steps should be taken in terms of legislation and incentives to ensure that Australia's contribution to global climate change is minimised, through federal government coordination and leadership to address the national issue. Further, the Australian Government should strive to influence the international community to take steps to endeavour that the human species is not responsible for or does not contribute to global climate change.
- b. State governments be required to legislate to require shire councils and other local government instrumentalities meet federally set targets to reduce the likely impacts of global warming upon future planning and for replacement/repair operations. Coastal vulnerability assessments and locality-specific strategic options need be urgently developed and implemented through planning and related actions at local government levels; Federal funding must underpin this activity. These actions might include elevation clearance requirements for development areas, service installations such as road placements and levels, drainage, sewage systems, power transmission provisions, evacuation provision in design.
- c. There should be established a national community warning system (irrespective of global warming) with an allied public education program to accommodate short-time response to local emergencies, such as tsunamis, terrorist attack, severe storms. Initially, this could extend to the rest of Australia the cyclone warning system presently established for the tropical regions of Australia

Yours faithfully,

Leigh Warneminde

President Coolum District Coast care Group